For the Eskimo's 'Protection'

FOURTH OF A SERIES
By FARLEY MOWAT

KEEP the DOOR CLOSED

'Experts' Advise

ONE OF THE STANDARD arguments used to keep the Eskimo in his igloo is the contention that he is inherently incapable of becoming part of our modern world.

For one thing, say the self-appointed experts, the Eskimo is an Oriental and his mind works differently from ours, and always will.

That this sort of racism is obviously absurd is proven by the numbers of Japanese and Chinese-Canadians who have become an integral part of Canada, even to the point of membership in the House of Commons.

It becomes ludicrous when we consider that the Eskimo has been in Canada for rather more than 3,000 years. His dim and distant ancestry was probably Oriental, but then so is the ancestry of something over half of the world's population.

A second basic argument often used in this context is the claim that the Eskimo's cultural heritage will disappear if it is exposed to western influence.

This is a most peculiar argument, since those who use it, and who also pose as the defenders of the Eskimo's right to a culture all his own, have themselves destroyed the original Eskimo ethical, moral and philosophical beliefs and have replaced these with ones that originated in the Mediterranean area.

What the exponents of this argument mean in effect is that the Eskimo must perforce accept western religious ideas, but he must not on any account be allowed to partake of the material advantages that go with them.

In any event it is a sad fact that there are only remnants of an Eskimo intellectual culture remaining in the Canadian Arctic, of which the most vital is the Innuit language.

Furthermore, the Eskimo material culture has all but disappeared with the collapse of the igloo and of the way of life which it represented.

The clincher in the series of arguments for keeping Inuk shut off from the world was expressed by Father Ducharme of the Oblate Order in Keewatin, at Ottawa last spring.

DURING A MEETING of the Eskimo Affairs Committee (upon which not an Eskimo was to be found) Father Ducharme went on record as saying: "Where the ways of the white men are concerned, the Eskimo are like children and should be treated as children."

But is that contention sound?

It was not until 1953 that the Eskimo had a chance to escape from the life to which we had condemned him. In that year, and with the help of the Department of Northern Affairs, the doors were sprung a little.

Only five years have passed, during which he has been able to show what he can do. The record he has run up in that short time is formidable.

The first place where Inuk had a chance to show that he was not a child, but a man—and a first-class one, too—was on the DEW line. Though he encountered a color bar amongst some American organizations involved in the construction of the line, Inuk nevertheless soon demonstrated that he could do almost any job he was given, and do it well.

Given the opportunity, the Eskimo is quick to show his worth in many skilled jobs.

His contribution to the building of the line was large, and though the construction work is finished now, there are still 96 Eskimos employed on the line on a permanent basis.

The only trouble with the DEW line was that many whites believed the myth that Inuk was an inferior, and the opportunities he was given were therefore limited.

This was not the case at Rankin Inlet Nickel Mine.

Rankin is on the west coast of Hudson Bay, in Keewatin. In 1957, as the mine was coming into production, the mine manager, Andy Easton, concluded that the Eskimos clamoring for work on the property were not just hewers of wood and haulers of water.

He organized an on-the-job training plan and gave the Innuit a chance to try their hands at many skilled and semi-skilled tasks. The results were phenomental.

TODAY THIS ONE small mine employs 85 Eskimos. They drive trucks and bulldozers; they run surface machinery; they operate all the underground locomotives and the complex mucking machines; they work as trained carpenters and even as electricians.

The only part of the operation into which they have not yet penetrated is the office and they will be there, too, when the handicap of language and lack of formal education has been surmounted.

The Eskimos at Rankin have earned, and they receive, equal status and stature with any whites. Their pay rates are the same, their treatment is identical, except in one respect—they are denied the right to have a pint of beer after work—a denial enforced by the government under pressure from religious and other groups.

The Rankin management is enthusiastic on the subject of Eskimo employees. They forsee the day and expect it soon, when the entire operation will be run by Eskimos with the exception of technical positions.

Easton believes that even these will be filled by Eskimos as soon as Innuit students are given a chance to acquire college training.

On Baffin Island the Eskimos, assisted by Northern Affairs, have shown what they can do at the new Arctic town of Frobisher Bay. Here Eskimos run the movie theatre, a laundry, a hostel for visitors, a bakery and their own housing development.

They are also running a market scheme for selling the famous soap-stone sculpture which, in the five years since Inuk began to gain his freedom, has become world famous.

On the south boundary of the Arctic there is a new Eskimo community at Churchill Most of the men are employed at the Army camp where they are doing well at a dozen trades. They live in good wooden houses which—contrary to the prophecies of the opponents of this experiment—they keep in excellent condition.

Both here and at aRnkin, Inuk banks his wages and the majority of the Eskimos display a canny appreciation of the value of the money that many of us might envy.

UNFORTUNATELY the opportunities for Inuk to show what he can do, are still scarce in the Arctic. But as new opportunities arise they are swamped by Innuit eager to escape the igloo.

Perhaps the most spectacular demonstrations of Inuk's ability have been displayed in the south. Large numbers of Eskimos have recently been brought down to sanataria, and their eyes have been opened to a new world.

Some of them have stayed south and have become registered nurses, marine wireless operators, clerical employees and trainees in many trades.

An Eskimo girl who trained in Winnipeg is now in charge of the nursing staff at Frobisher's new hospital.

Another Eskimo girl has made a spectacular leap from the stone age to the space age, and is now a stewardess on an airliner.

These were all people who, less than a decade ago, were cut off from any understanding of, or experience in our world. Their achievements become almost fantastic when considered in this context.

But in Greenland, where opportunity was not denied to the Eskimo, the Innuit fill more than 80 kinds of jobs in the skilled catagories. These include running printing presses, writing books, operating radio transmitters, and composing plays and music.

If we continue to subscribe to the concept of the Eskimo as a retarded child of nature, I believe we put ourselves on the same side as the South African Nationalists, the Negro-baiters in the southern U.S., and with all the rest of the exponents of racial supremacy.

Already pointed remarks have been made in the United Nations and elsewhere throughout the world concerning our right to talk about the sancitity of the Four Freedoms when we have denied all four to a racial minority in our own land.

ART OLD AS EGYPT

By SHIRLEY FRY

This is the first of a series of stories of renowned merchandise, sold through Victoria shops to visitors, as well as to appreciative Victorians.

WHEN YOU CHOOSE an English "hand-blocked" scarf, shirt or any of the other wonderful items fashioned in hand-blocked materials, you will be buying craftsmanship handed down from the ancient Egyptians.

Produced in very small quantities by less than 200 skilled men in the whole of England, this art is still much appreciated around the world. The unique and beautiful patterns can only be created by hand and processes used today are practically the same as those of over a 100 years ago. Some of the pattern blocks still used are of that age.

The pattern block is made of sycamore or walnut because of its hardness and close grain. The outline is cut or burned into the wood and the fine lines are shaped pieces of copper or brass hammered into the tracing of the pattern. The first block is used as a guide for others; one has to be carved for each color. The blocks average about 10 inches square and one set may take up to four months to complete.

Whatever fabric is being used is attached to a cloth-covered table with water gum and ironed into position. The outline block is pressed on a dye-pad, then on to the fabric. When in position, it is tapped with a heavy hammer to make the color go right through. This process is repeated for each color in the pattern. In some cases, there have been over a hundred different impressions made on each square yard of material.

The fabric is stiff from the water gum when it is removed from the table, but washing at this stage would destroy the rich colors, so the fabric is subjected to steaming to "fix" the colors and make the dyes penetrate.

After fixing, the cloth is rinsed in running water to remove the gum, washed in soap, rinsed again and hung to dry. A stretching machine removes creases and winds the fabric into rolls for delivery to retailers. Silk squares, scarves and handkerchiefs are sent away to be given hems and returned for careful laundering before they are sent to shops.

Unique . . . very true, and you will wear any English hand-blocked fabric with pride knowing that here you have an ancient craft more precious today than ever before.